

A RANGE EXTENSION FOR THE MOTH BUTTERFLY, *LIPHYRA
BRASSOLIS* MAJOR ROTHSCHILD (LEPIDOPTERA:
LYCAENIDAE)

G.B. MONTEITH

Queensland Museum, P.O. Box 3300, South Brisbane, Qld, 4101

The well known Australian moth butterfly, *Liphyra brassolis major*, has an obligatory relationship with the green tree ant (weaver ant), *Oecophylla smaragdina* (Fabricius), its larvae living inside the foliage nests of the ant and feeding exclusively on the ant's larvae. Because of this, the butterfly's distribution is limited by the distribution of *O. smaragdina* which has been mapped in Australia by Lokkers (1986) to occur along the tropical coast from Broome (W.A.) in the west to Yeppoon (Qld) in the south. Hacobian (1992) has just recorded *O. smaragdina* 100 km further south of Yeppoon at Tannum Sands.

Until recently the distribution of *L. brassolis* was not known to extend to either the western or the southern limit of the ant in Australia (Common & Waterhouse 1981). In the west Yeates (1990) recorded the butterfly from Kalumburu in W.A. taking its distribution 500 km further west from its previous limit at Darwin but still 600 km short of the ant's limit at Broome. In the south the butterfly's known limit has been at Mackay, 380 km north of the ant's accepted southern limit at Tannum Sands, though Common and Waterhouse suggest that "it may occur even as far south as Yeppoon, where the green tree ant *Oecophylla* is plentiful". The record below now confirms its presence at Yeppoon.

On 22 May 1992 in company with Mr Alan Walford-Huggins, I collected four live nests of *O. smaragdina* from margins of low coastal rainforest about 5 km north of Yeppoon and carried them to Brisbane by air the same day. Most nests were built in foliage of *Cupaniopsis anacardioides* Radlk. That evening Mr Anthony Hiller and I anaesthetised one large nest with carbon dioxide to remove the ants for display purposes. In opening the nest one small (15 mm) *L. brassolis* larva was discovered. It died the following day but its distinctive appearance makes its identity unquestionable. The specimen is now in the Queensland Museum. On 29 May, a second, larger *L. brassolis* larva (ca. 20 mm) was noted moving on the outside of one of the other nests which had been attached to a potted shrub for live display. Thus at least two of the four collected *O. smaragdina* nests had contained larvae of this rarely seen butterfly. Following this discovery, the Tannum Sands locality should be checked for the presence of *L. brassolis*.

References

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